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ABSTRACT

Investigations of both printed professional materials for reading teachers and the interaction of reading authorities across the United States have revealed ten current directions and needs in reading instruction. They are: (1) an emphasis on absolute educational accountability with respect to reading skills of students; (2) renewed and pronounced demands for teacher accountability; (3) the use of classroom-tested informal evaluation techniques by classroom teachers; (4) the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for all children; (5) increased attention to the holistic development of reading skills; (6) the development of better methods through which teachers can share information about students' reading abilities; (7) the growing realization that there is no one preferred method for teaching reading to all children; (8) recognition of the need for individualized inservice programs for reading teachers at different ability levels; (9) the need for reading teachers to convey information to the public about positive aspects of current reading programs; and (10) the need for building reading programs that correlate with practical reading requirements that students will face in later life. (A parable is included that demonstrates the need for more than one method of teaching reading.) (GT)

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TEN NEW DIRECTIONS FOR READING IN THE 80's: WHAT THEY MEAN TO YOUR SCHOOL

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I am pleased to be here today to discuss a very important aspect of reading instruction which is of concern to all teachers and administrators as we enter the decade of the 1980's. There is a great need for each of us to take a very close look at what we are doing today in reading instruction and what we expect to be doing in the future.

There is no time in the history of this country when there has been more criticism and evaluation of schools and teachers than there is at the present time. The public is expecting more and more with less and less of allocation of tax funds and general financial aid. We are faced with some very definite trends in the 1980's with respect to school enrollments and tax supported funds in the schools. In many areas of the country, there is a decided drop in school enrollment with an increasing demand for lower tax levies for schools. Because of these conditions, reading educators need to have a firm grasp of the new directions in reading and apply these trends to future instructional programs for the children they teach.

During the past several months I have been engaged in some intensive investigation with respect to both printed professional materials and the interaction of reading authorities across the country. With the conclusion of this research investigation, I have decided that there are no less than 10 directions in reading instruction. During this address I wish to delineate what I have perceive these directions to be and explain how these new directions may apply to you and your school. I would not expect or even imagine that all reading

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authorities would agree completely with my list. I do feel however, that they are viable, urgent and important concepts that must be included in any useful reading instruction program for the future. Some of these are the result of public pressure, while others are what I feel are urgent and necessary curriculum changes which must be undertaken if children are to be assured a useful educational program for the future. The directions that I am about to discuss are not given in any particular order of importance. As far as I am concerned, they have roughly equal importance.

I. The first direction which I would like to emphasize today is that of absolute accountability with respect to reading skills of students. At the present time there are at least 35 states which have passed reading competency laws for high school graduates.

There is a considerable amount of criticism coming from the armed services regarding the reading abilities of the recruits in the U.S. Army. Major Gerald Ohlman of the U.S. Army reports the following: "There is an alarming picture of the reading abilities with respect to Field Artillery Specialist in recent examinations, since only 6% of these men passed at a suitable level. Some 90% of the soldiers who maintained nuclear weapons failed their S.Q.T. Tests. Tank Repairmen who maintained the tank guns had only a 1% precision rate. The Army has no choice but to utilize the personnel as provided by Congress. Therefore, it is the duty of Congress to provide trainable people and it is the responsibility of the people of America to insure that they do."

Accountability for students may have some positive effects for both teachers and parents of students. Teachers will have more precise goals to follow and parents will understand that they have a responsibility for helping teachers and schools in seeing that young people achieve state-mandated competencies. Another aspect may well be an increased level of credibility which may come from the public with respect to reading instructional programs.

II. The second direction which I would like to discuss is that of renewed and pronounced accountability of teachers for insuring that students develop desired levels of reading efficiency. State-mandated competency laws have an inherent amount of teacher accountability in them. No teacher or school can afford the bad publicity which might come from large numbers of students failing reading competency tests. While we can explain many non-school factors for reading failure, we must also admit that there are many school-related factors correlated with reading successes. Accountability for teachers also demands that all who teach reading skills need to be adequately trained for their positions. A cursory glance of the requirements for becoming an elementary or secondary teacher in many states reveals that only one or two reading methods courses are required in many instances. For example, a number of states do not even require one reading course for secondary teachers. We know that reading instruction is a kindergarten through 12th grade program. If secondary teachers are not trained appropriately to function as teachers of reading, then formal reading instruction activities effectively terminate at grade six.

Since it appears that teachers will be held more accountable for the reading progress of students, it will necessitate a closer look at preservice training of teachers on the part of universities and a more realistic look at inservice training of teachers by school districts. In short, we cannot hold teachers accountable for pupil progress in reading if proper programs of training are not established for teachers.

III. It is becoming increasingly clear that another definite trend is developing in reading across the country. This entails the use of classroom tested informal evaluation techniques by classroom teachers. Though there are over 125 commercial reading tests, there are several aspects of reading which cannot possibly be measured by any of these tests. These would include love of reading, many critical reading skills, and silent reading habits. In order to make a complete evaluation of any child's reading growth, it is necessary to involve both commercial and informal evaluation techniques. Therefore, in developing an adequate program of evaluation with respect to reading growth, we must not restrict our thinking to the administration and evaluation of data from only commercial reading tests. To assess the total reading needs of any given child will require the careful analysis of data which can only be obtained from informal reading tests. These tests might include the standard reading devices such as the informal reading inventory, the Close Test, the Maze Test, and the simple listing of common words at various reading levels. Another informal technique which we should stress is observation while reading silently. We need to know how to analyze observational data and relate to information from commercial as well as informal tests.

IV. The fourth major direction in reading which I detect is that of the development of I.E.P's for all children. As many of you know, Public Law 94-142 requires the construction of individual educational plans for each handicapped child. This procedure has worked fairly well for these groups of children. It appears to me that all teachers need to develop this philosophical approach for all children, not just those who are handicapped in some manner. In short, he/she will analyze all of the diagnostic data available and plan suitable programs for individual children based on the needs of these children. This will necessitate as a first step, the designation of what reading skills are desired of the children in a given school or classroom. The second step would be the diagnosis of each child's reading abilities to determine which skills have been learned and which have not been learned. The third step would be the development of reading I.E.P.'s for each child to help each learner to overcome his/her deficiencies. There is a definite feeling on the part of some persons that the old three-reading group approach is passe and must be replaced by a meaningful program based on individual needs of children.

V. A 5th major direction I see in reading instruction is increased attention on the part of the astute reading educators to the need of thinking about reading skill development in a holistic manner. There have been some reading programs developed in the past several years which have divided reading into as many as 500 to 600 separate skill components. Some opinions being expressed by reading researchers appear to cast some doubt on the proposition that the reading act can be divided in such a manner. For example, some teachers feel that the "Skill Them - Drill Them" approach is the only way to teach reading. We must think of the reading act in a much broader frame of reference for reading. Reading is certainly more than phonics - more than 4 levels of comprehension, more than vocabulary exercises, and more than filling out

hundreds of workbook pages.

We must think of reading instruction as preparing students for a life-long attitude of love and respect for reading as a pleasurable activity and as a process for gaining information.

VI. New and innovative reading programs being developed today and in the near future provide for much better methods of sharing information about reading abilities of students from this year's teacher to next year's teacher. In far too many instances, previous to this date, classroom teachers have tended to consider the child's reading instruction for a single year's period of time. The psychology of learning tells us that a child's reading growth pattern is continuous and far-reaching. If indeed we are to treat children as individual learners with preferred modalities, we must be sure that reading progress records are transferred from one teacher to another in a meaningful manner. We must not be worried about a third grade child reading sixth grade material if the sixth grade level is his or her appropriate instructional level of reading. The new teacher in September must continue the instructional program terminated by the previous teacher. He/she must not ask the child to repeat the lessons undertaken in the previous grade if those lessons are not needed or desired. Through it all, I contend that school officials must see that there is a very precise manner for recording student reading skill development and progress. Additionally, inservice must be provided for every teacher in understanding this data and recording appropriate information about individual children on school record forms. We then, must see each teacher as a link and only one link in the progression of reading instruction which takes place for the child.

VII. As of 1980 there is substantial research to indicate once and for all that there is no one preferred or desired method of teaching reading for all children. The National First Grade Studies in the 1960's yielded this data in a very persuasive manner. A recent policy statement was adopted by the I.R.A. Board of Directors in November, 1979 which indicated that the association is firmly committed to the idea that there is no one method of teaching reading which will insure success for all children. There are groups of persons in this country who are dedicated to the idea that synthetic phonics is the only way to teach reading. They are convinced that reading instruction will never improve until "Look-Say" approaches are abandoned and phonics programs are installed for good. I can substantiate the need for more than one method of reading by reading a short story written by an anonymous person of recent date. The story goes as follows:

> Once upon a time in the tiny kingdom of Root there lived a king named Esai. Although his kingdom was poor, Esai desired above all else the world to be known the wisest and most gracious king in the land. He spent most of his days searching for that one most magnificent deed that would make his subjects fondly remember him forever. In the twilight of his life a famous wizard came to his court. The wizard informed the king that knowledge was the noblest gift he could bestow upon the citizenry of Root. The wizard promised Esai he would be known eternally as "Esai the Wise" if all his subjects could be taught to read during his reign. At this time the king was much too old to travel but he had a son named John whom he dearly loved and trusted. So King Esai called his son to him. "Johnny," he said, "before I die, there is but one request that I make of you. Go out into the world and find a way to teach all of my people to read. This is the noblest gift that I can give them. If you accomplish this, then my kingdom will soon be yours. Son, I'll not rest until I know that all my people are able to read." John loved his father very much and he wished to please him. He also sincerely desired to be king. He accepted King Esai's challenge and set off to seek his fortune.
>
> As he walked down the lane he met a man in splendid attire. "Ho there Prince, listen to what I have to offer. My name if GRK. Your great guest has reached my ears and I'm here to offer you the treasured key. It is called the "Three Great Reading Keys". It guarantees that everyone can learn to read. My Prince, the method is yours for 500 pieces of gold a year. I guarantee that the citizenry of Root will read

by my method. They may not understand what they read, but they will read. You need seek no farther-Swing and Sway with GRK, my dear Prince John." Thank you sir," said the Prince politely, "but I must travel on and investigate other methods. You see we are poor in Root, but we poor Roots must receive the most for our poor Root rubles."

Some miles farther the Prince encountered another man. "Ho there Prince, listen to what I have to offer. My name is Oral. Your great quest has reached my ears and I'm here to offer you the golden treasure to reading. It is called the "Oral Reading Orientation Method". My system is completely housed in kits called Oral Kits. Remember, Prince Johnny, we have a kit for everyting. Our kits fit; I always say. Why, with my system no one will ever again ask why Prince Johnny can't read." "Thank you sir," said the Prince most politely, "but I must travel on to investigate other methods."

Later in the day Prince John met a beautiful, seductive, young lady. "Ho, handsome Prince; listen to what I have to offer. My name is Snowy. Not only have I the great treasure you seek - my system is called the 'Snowy Moon-June-Spoon Method. Look, my young, handsome, charming Prince Johnny, at the beautiful colors we use and the fine book bindings. You may go home a tremendous success if you take my advice. You, sweet Prince, may have this once in a lifetime opport-nity for only 500 pieces of silver and my personal instructions free!" "Thank you, fair damsel," said Prince John shyly, "but I must travel on. I'll make very certain that I choose the right method for my poor group."

If the student gives the correct response he receives a piece of candy - clever? Our clients may have rotten teeth, but they can read." "Thank you, but really, I must continue my journey."

For the next two years determined Prince John visited many lands where he observed a multitude of reading techniques. He listened to people explain the "Crawl Approach". They suggested every citizen of Root practice crawling for six months before receiving reading instruction.

Another group of specialists described the "Tiddle-de-Wink System", If the student gave the proper response he received a Tiddle-de. If he gave an improper response, he received a Wink.

Prince John studied the "Pre-naval Reading Method" while visiting the exotic isle of Belli.

He met a man who suggested that he consider his new esthetic "Shot-in-the Arm System".

Each promoter guaranteed wonderful results. Weary, defeated and thoroughly confused our fair Prince John returned to Root to face King Esai's wrath. He had traveled only a few miles into the land of Root however, when he noticed a small school nestled in a tiny valley. He paused to watch in wonderment for a long while because it appeared to him the children were eagerly engaged in learning. As the happy students left for home, he approached the teacher. "Pardon me," said the Prince, "your students appear to enjoy learning. May I ask which method you use? Is it the

"SWING AND SWAY WITH GRK"?

"MOON-JUNE-SPOON"?

"ORAL KIT" bit"?

"DANDY CANDY APPROACH"?

"THE CRAWL?

"THE BELLI"?

or "THE TIDDLE-DE-WINK METHOD"?

"None, poor man," she didn't recognize her Prince John, "you see, I don't teach a method, I teach a child. I use whatever means it takes to reach children to read. Some need security while others need humility. Some need affection while others need discipline. Some simply need to be exposed and guided to books. There are as many ways to teach reading as there are children."

The Prince and the teacher talked of things. Finally Prince John revealed his majestic identity by solemnly displaying the royal signet ring. He then commanded the awe struck school teacher to accompany him to the castle of great King Esai the Wise.

He had found the one best way to teach reading a dedicated, perceptive teacher.

VIII. The eighth new direction in reading involves an aspect which I touched on earlier. For many years we have been emphasizing the importance and need for the individual teaching of children based on their respective learning needs. Somehow, we have never applied this same principle to teachers. There is a feeling on the part of some school administrators that all teachers have equal capabilities for teaching reading in a meaningful manner. One

needs only to observe all of the teachers in a given building while they are teaching reading skills to know that there are widely varying levels of competency for performing these tasks. Some teachers are beginning their experiences. Others have had as much as 20 to 25 years of teaching experience. Some teachers are rigid in their approach to teaching children while others are quite flexible. The public and the Superintendent of Schools expect all of the children to graduate from the various grade levels at competent levels of reading development. If this is to be realized, we must devise immediately and in the years ahead individualized inservice programs for helping teachers at various ability levels to help children develop their reading potential. It has been my unfortunate experience to give addresses and presentations for large inservice meetings in which there were beginning teachers and teachers close to retirement. I was given little or no direction as to what kinds of materials I was to present with the possible exception of the general title and maybe one or two sub-topics. In the final analysis, I tried the "shotgun approach" and tried to present information suitable for all of these kinds of teachers. I realize that some of the beginning teachers perhaps found some of my topics too complex and some experienced teachers found them to simplistic. I would hope that as we develop inservice programs for teachers in the future that supervisors and other administrators would soon attempt to evaluate teaching ability levels of instructors and construct inservice programs accordingly. In other words, some teachers need much inservice instruction while other teachers need little if any inservice.

IX. The ninth direction for reading in the 80's demands that educators in general, provide better public relations techniques for conveying to the public relative information about what schools are doing with respect to viable reading programs.

We need to convey to the public some inportant statistics which have been developed by Dr. Roger Farr, out-going President of the International Reading Association. Farr cites a study in Indiana which shows for example that sixth and tenth grade students in 1976 performed as well as students in the same grades given the same reading test in 1944-45. Moreover, the students in 1976 were younger than the students in the same grade in the 1940's. When the scores were adjusted to reflect this age differential, the scores of the 1976 students were significantly higher. Dr. Farr also cites a similar study which compares reading achievement of Iowa third graders in 1940 and 1965. The performance of those in 1965 was markedly higher. The median performance has continued to rise since then. In fact, the median third grade level in 1977 was about six months higher than median level 22 years earlier. Finally, Dr. Farr says "Contrary to popularity opinion, American students compare quite favorable to other students throughout the world. He mentions a study in 1977 which shows that the top 9% of twelfth grade students in the U.S. performed better on reading comprehension tests than comparable students in the 14 other countries tested. What I am saying then is that we as reading educators need to inform our publics about the good things that are being accomplished in reading programs across the country. There are groups of persons bent on criticising teachers in schools. We

need to conduct a counteroffensive to let the people know that reading programs are more innovative than ever before and that teachers are trying to do a better job.

X. The final direction in reading which I wish to discuss is that in the decade ahead we must place more emphasis on the correlation between reading skills developed in schools and those required by employers in their respective businesses and agencies. For example, we need to give direct attention to basal reading stories and chapters in content books. We need to engage students in such meaningful and practical skill components relative to reading and completing a job application form, reading a recipe, reading a set of directions for assembling a tool case, etc. It is difficult for a manager of a store to place much credence in the local school reading program when young applicants have problems in his store misspelling many words and cannot follow directions.

Earlier, you will remember, I cited some dreary statistics with regard to army recruits. Driver's license examiners frequently lament many persons with high school diplomas cannot read test questions for renewing driver's licenses. It seems to me if we are to increase our level of stature as educators in the eyes of many taxpayers, we are going to have to be firm in our resolve to build reading programs which correlate more with practical reading requirements demanded in later life of our students. I can best illustrate to point by a little essay by Niomi White entitled, "I Taught Them All". Her essay reads as follows:

I have taught in high school for ten years. During that time I have given assignments, among others, to a murderer, an evangelist, a pugilist, a thief, and an imbecile.

The murderer was a quiet little boy who sat on the front seat and regarded me with pale blue eyes; the evangelist, easily the most popular boy in school, had the lead in the junior play; the pugilist lounged by the window and let loose at intervals a horse rounding laugh that startled even the geraniums; the thief was a gay-hearted Lothario with a song on his lips, and the imbecile, a soft eyed little animal seeking the shadows.

The murderer awaits death in the state penitentiary; the evangelist has lain a year now in the village churchyard; the pugilist lost an eye in a brawl in Hongkong; the thief, standing on tiptoe, can see the windows of my room from the county jail, and the once gentle-eyed little moron beats his head against a padded wall in the state asylum.

All of these pupils once sat in my room sat and looked at me gravely across worn brown desks. I must have been a great help to those pupils -- I taught them the rhyming scheme of the Elizabethen sonnet and how to diagram a complex sentence.

In closing, I would like to read a poem which summarizes some negative and positive thoughts on reading in school as defined by Nancy Whitelaw of Buffalo, N.Y. The poem reads as follows:

SOME NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE THOUGHTS ON READING IN SCHOOL

Having a reading program based on just
diagnosis and prescription is like making
a cake and not tasting it-
  Like notes of musix on paper-
  Like a library with closed doors-
  Like a marriage by contract.

Reading without sharing is like watching
a circus without saying anything-
  Like a commercial without a TV
    program-
  Like a frame without a picture-
  Like describing a spiral staircase
    without using your hands.

Explaining the rule for determining
whether g is "hard" or "soft" is like out-
lining how to play jazz-
  Like instructing how to kiss-
  Like using a compass without a map-
  Like explaining a bad joke.

Measuring .3 year's growth in reading is
like measuring a sunrise-
  Like measuring a laugh-
  Like measuring an idea-
  Like weighing happiness.

Reading is not a Forty-five Minute Period of Instruction with Behavioral Objectives and Predictable Outcomes.

Reading is enjoying, learning, feeling, becoming, sensing, laughing, crying, hating, deciding, loving, growing, sympathizing, listening.
  Reading is All Day
    Being and Becoming
    Growing and Growing.

(Nancy Whitelaw
Buffalo, N.Y)